

“What is the Difference between Immigrants and Refugees?” 2003

Refugees

Refugees are forced to leave their home countries because of war, environmental disasters, political persecution and/or religious or ethnic intolerance. They come to the United States with a special immigration status that gives them automatic admission into the country and helps them connect with family members who are already in the country. This status also provides them with a “green card” or a permit to work. Refugees are “invited” to live in the United States to start a new life.

Immigrants

Immigrants generally come to the U.S. for one of two reasons:

- they are joining family members who already live in this country
or
- they are “economic immigrants” seeking work and a better life for themselves and their families

Immigrants and refugees have a good deal in common. They experience new cultures and languages. They are often ethnic minorities who might face open discrimination or other forms of hostility, regardless of their immigration status.

Adapted from The New Iowans, A Companion Book to the PBS Miniseries The New Americans (2003), provided courtesy of Iowa Center for Immigrant Leadership and Integration, University of Northern Iowa.